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ABSTRACT

Designed to assess analytically the quality of children's fictional stories, this study is composed of a set of twelve scales: structure, word usage, characterization, setting, point of view, conversation, detail, appeals to senses, values, ending, sentence structure, and situation. Each scale is scored 0, 1, or 2, with the highest possible score being 24. The separate scales are based on a review of literary criticism and theory, an analysis of children's writing, and an examination of authors' and English professors' responses to a group of ten stories written by children. A validity check indicated that the scale did discriminate maturity in writing. [This document is one of those reviewed in The Research Instruments Project (TRIP) monograph "Measures for Research and Evaluation in the English Language Arts" to be published in cooperation with the ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills. A TRIP review which precedes the document lists its category (Writing), title, author, date, and age range (elementary, junior high), and describes the instrument's purpose and physical characteristics.] (JM)

NCTE Committee on Research

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CS 201 331

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH
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Category: Writing

Title: Literary Rating Scale

Author: Eileen Tway

Age Level: Elementary-Junior High

Description of Instrument:

Purpose: To assess the quality of children's fictional stories.

Date of Construction: 1969

Physical Description: LRS is a set of twelve scales: structure, word usage, characterization, setting, point of view, conversation, detail, appeals to senses, values, ending sentence structure, and situation. Each scale is scored 0, 1, or 2 according to whether little or none, some, or effective handling of the scale element was evident in the story. The complete LRS describes in detail each of the scoring levels for each scale. LRS is intended to be used to score analytically children's stories. Highest possible score is 24.

Validity, Reliability, and Normative Data:

The separate scales are based on a review of literary criticism and theory, on an analysis of children's writing, on an examination of authors' and English professors' rankings and written comments on a group of ten stories written by children. A check on validity was a ranking by adult readers naive about children's literature of twenty stories, four of them by adult writers of children's stories, the rest by advanced and average second, third, fourth, and sixth graders. The rankings indicated that the scale did discriminate "maturity" in writing.

Four experts who scored twenty stories independent of each other and without practice with LRS reached an interrater agreement of .73 (Kendall's coefficient of concordance, significant at .001). Test-retest reliability of LRS for twenty intern

teachers was .72 without practice, with stability coefficients ranging from .44 to .91 for the twenty.

After training in the use of the scale pre-service teachers reached an interrater agreement of .58, in-service teachers an agreement of .51 (both Kendall's coefficient of concordance results for twenty raters scoring twenty stories). The author of the scale argues that these coefficients would have been much higher had she used conventional interrater reliability checks for only two or three raters.

Ordering Information:

EDRS

Related Documents:

Tway, Doris E. A Study of the Feasability of Training Teachers to Use the Literary Rating Scale in Evaluating Children's Fiction Writing. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms, 1971. Order No. 71-10, 997.

A STUDY OF THE FEASIBILITY OF TRAINING TEACHERS TO USE THE LITERARY RATING SCALE IN EVALUATING CHILDREN'S FICTION WRITING

by

Eileen Tway

B.S., Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, 1952
M.A., Teachers College, Columbia University, 1962

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education in the Graduate School of Syracuse University,
June, 1970

Approved Thomas E. Clayter

Date May 1, 1970

LITERARY RATING SCALE

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Syracuse University

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Directions To The Rater:

The Literary Rating Scale gives standards by which to judge the literary quality of a story. Twelve elements are listed, each of which is to be rated 0, 1, or 2 by the rater according to the amount of the element present in the story and/or the effectiveness with which it is handled by the author. Examples are given in the form of passages from stories to illustrate each possible rating for each element.

The rater should read the rating scale items, definitions, and examples first to familiarize himself with the scale. He should then read the story to be rated in order to get a general idea of the contents. Next the rater should take each element on the scale and look back to the story to see how he would rate that particular element. After all elements have been rated and given a numerical value, the values should be totaled for the story's overall score.

LITERARY RATING SCALE

Score Sheet

Title of Story .....

Elements	Score (0, 1, or 2)
1. Structure	____
2. Ending	____
3. Sentence Structure	____
4. Word Usage	____
5. Characterization	____
6. Setting	____
7. Point of View	____
8. Conversation	____
9. Detail	____
10. Appeals to Senses	____
11. Values	____
12. Situation	____
Total	_____

Name of Rater .....

LITERARY RATING SCALE

1. Structure

Structure refers to the way a story is built, or put together, with a beginning, middle, and end. It has to do with the way the parts fit together, the overall design which reveals the problem and the resolution.

0 Little Story Structure -- This may mean just a rambling collection of sentences or a story that is not well organized, as well as a story without one of the essential structural parts named above.

1 Rudimentary -- This can mean a problem and a rather forced ending. The essential structural parts are there, but are not skillfully woven together.

2 Well-developed -- The problem and resolution are neatly worked out. There is good form and organization.

Examples:

Little: Once upon a time there were three bunnies who lived in a tree. There was a carrot garden there. They ate carrots out of the garden.

Note: No problem - no real story line

Rudimentary: Once upon a time there was a teacher who had a class that wrote backwards. She asked all the teachers what should she do. They always gave her ideas but they never worked. One day a teacher said, "Why don't you write backwards and the children might write forwards?" And so she did just that, and it worked. And from that day on the children wrote right.

Note: Problem and rather ordinary solution, but still a solution

Well-developed: The movie was going to be called "The Man of the Cave." Fon was Dracula. Well, today was the big day. Fon was all ready. "All ready?" asked the Director. "Yes," replied everyone. "Lights, Camera, Action!!"

Movie

John, Mike, and Pete were brothers and they all liked to explore. John said to Mike and Pete, "Let's go and explore the old mansion." ... They were scared but they went anyway. When they got there the door was closed. Suddenly it opened and there was DRACULA!! ...

Then Mike jumped on Dracula, and Dracula almost bit Mike who was holding the timer. ... Mike moved sideways and the timer went off. Then Mike fell and Dracula shriveled to the ground.

The End

At the Academy Awards, Fon won the Best Actor Award, and the movie won Best Picture.

Note: Excerpts here show the outline of a story that was well structured with a framework effect - a story within a story.

2. Ending

The ending is the conclusion that is reached after a problem is resolved.

0 Ordinary -- Endings such as "They lived happily ever after" are quite usual.

1 Promising -- This would involve a fitting conclusion, and yet one that also has the suggestion of a different idea, such as "They lived happily ever after - until the next problem came along."

2 Clever -- This ending would be definitely different and well-executed, perhaps an ironic twist of the beginning.

Examples:

Ordinary: So the children went home and lived happily ever after.

Note: Trite

Promising: He imagined that he saw a real dinosaur. It was growling at him. It grabbed a shoe box and tried to hatch it?.! "Boy, I need my pill." Ding-a-ling. Boom! "What was that?" Little baby chicks came out of the shoe box. When they got home from the museum, he told what he saw. His father said: "Ridiculous."

Note: A little bit of humorous twist added to the ordinary "When they got home..., he told what he saw."

Clever: It took them about two days to find the treasure, and they had a lot of problems which I will not mention. All they found in the chest was a little piece of paper which read: "Any treasure worth having isn't a treasure worth burying."

Note: After the usual adventures of two treasure-seeking boys, this story gives a different kind of ending, one which seems to moralize on the folly of it all.

3. Sentence Structure

Sentence structure means the way the writer uses the guidelines of English word order to vary the way he puts words together in sentences and the way he puts sentences together in context.

0 Simple -- This would mean all or nearly all simple sentences - or all sentences starting alike, such as, with "The."

1 Some Variety -- There would be some variation in sentence structure: Adverb-Subject-Verb, etc., as well as Subject-Verb-Object.

2 Good Variety -- This would mean good sentence organization with a variety of sentence types, including sentences with dependent clauses.

Examples:

Simple: Once there was a little girl. She loves to go to the beach. She has a straw hat and a bucket. She is only five years old. And she can go to the beach by herself. Her mother, or father, does not go. She does not want to go home. Her mother said, "Come home." No.

Some Variety: Then they turned around and there was another ball of snow just big enough for the middle part of the snowman. Again they turned around and there was a ball big enough for the head of the snowman. Then right in front of their eyes appeared buttons, a carrot, and charcoal for the eyes, nose, and mouth.

Good Variety: After the battle with the spiters, the big, fat biters, and the creamy things, it all seemed quiet in the forest. Mr. Heckerlerabrown and Fred did not know where to go or stay, so they simply sat there, frightened, because they kept on thinking that creamy things or big, fat biters or spiters were sneaking up behind them.

4. Word Usage

Word usage means the different ways the author uses words, whether in description, coinage of new words, alliteration, or variation, for effect.

0 Usual -- Word usage is ordinary or trite.

1 Promising -- There is some trying out of words for effect.

2 Unusual -- There are unusual effects from coining new words or sheer beauty of descriptive passages or other effective uses.

Examples:

Usual: Then he went to the moon. When he got there, he saw that the moon was made of green cheese. He was so hungry he ate the moon.

Note: Usual word associations - moon made of green cheese

Promising: All that day the folks at the library searched for a cure for the cold. ... This went on and on until they were just about to give up all hope when suddenly Ralph Reference remembered his mother's secret formula for colds: This is the formula: a pinch of shelf-root, a dash of movie projector, 1 cup of book beans, stir to boiling, then sip.

Note: Coining of appropriate library folk name, Ralph Reference, and different combination of ingredients in recipe (However, use of secret formula is not as unique as word usage in evidence in following passage.)

Unusual: This is what happened to Fred. Fred went on walking, pretending that he had passed the wishing well and saying to himself, "I'm going to have good luck!" ... Then all of a sudden, standing in front of Fred were eight DUCKLINGS!! Fred was very, very, very, a hundred times very, surprised. "You have bad luck, and we're going to give you more," said one of the ducklings. "Will it help if I go back and put in a penny now?" asked Fred. "Too late."
"Oh, down the docky crickets," said Fred very unhappily.

Note: The build-up of very to "a hundred times very", the easy style, and the unique expletive

5. Characterization

Characterization refers to the way in which the author reveals the qualities of the characters in his story.

0 Undeveloped -- Characters are paper-thin or stereotyped.

1 Beginning Characterization -- There is some description. Some definite characteristics are given, showing what characters are like.

2 Well-rounded -- Characters are well-defined; they seem real, believable. Character is revealed through thought, actions, conversation, etc., as well as through description. A character may show development or change as the story progresses.

Examples:

Undeveloped: Once a fair came to a town. They had a contest. It was a horseshoe contest. There were three men in the contest. One man won the contest. The fair went away.

Note: No characterization here. The man who won is just one of three men. The reader does not know any more than that, surely not enough to make him care who won.

Beginning: Mark Meany is the meanest, most rotten person in all Beetlebust. He broke every rule of the town and even had one of his own. It was, "Be mean!" And he hated children.

Well-rounded: Rita didn't want to babysit Albert, but she needed the money to buy her mother a birthday present. When she got there, Rita saw Albert tying a tin can to a puppy's tail. Rita tried to stop him but it was too late. ... When Rita went into the living room, Albert wasn't there.... All of a sudden there was a big explosion. Albert had made a smoke and stink bomb mixed in one and it exploded.

Note: The author does not tell that Albert is naughty, but hints at something wrong when Rita does not want to go, and then proceeds to "show" the reader by example the kind of boy Albert is.

6. Setting

Setting refers to the time and place of the happenings in the story.

0 None -- There is no setting or the setting is only mentioned, not described.

1 Rudimentary -- There is a brief description of time or place.

2 Well-developed -- The reader is given a feel for the place, whether it is real or imaginary.

Examples:

None: Once across the ocean, Priscilla was worried. She didn't know what to do. She found an old deserted mine and fell asleep.... When Priscilla woke up she wasn't in the mine.

Note: Setting just mentioned, not developed

Rudimentary: Fred began to run because it was beginning to rain. Then all of a sudden Fred bumped into a tree. And when he looked up, there was a big gigantic forest! At the gate of the forest there was a sign that said "The Forest of McGillah."

Well-developed: Sad rain. It was a dark, dismal day. Rain was drumming on the roof. Alice couldn't think of a thing to do. Finally, she looked at the room closely. It had blue, dirty walls, dirty chipping ceiling, a map of the world on one side of the room, and a fireplace on the other side. There was a desk, an old gray armchair, and a sagging couch, plus an old worn rug.

7. Point of View

The point of view is the viewpoint from which the story is told. To find point of view, the reader asks himself, "Through whose eyes am I viewing the happenings of this story?"

0 Unclear -- The writer may change viewpoints so abruptly that the reader is confused. Or the amateur writer may be uncertain himself as to who is telling the story. For example, he may start out autobiographically, and switch unexpectedly to an outsider's account.

1 Clear -- The handling of point of view is adequate.

2 Artistic -- The author handles point of view with ease and skill. He may bring several different points of view together in an artistic way.

Examples:

Unclear: Once upon a time there was an Indian boy who lived in the woods. His name is Song Bird. He loved nature. When I was a teen, I went to the woods to hunt. I saw a horse. He caught it. He saw an owl. When I was a man, I had a farm of horses.

Clear: One day I was in my house, when all of a sudden a bunny hopped in. Well, I certainly thought I was day dreaming. But I knew I wasn't day dreaming when I heard the bunny talk. It said, "You may have any wish you want." Well, I wished for a big Easter Egg Hunt. And I got it!

Note: Started out in first person and kept it that way.

Artistic: Our trip is to the moon. Tracy, Tizzywig, and I have already arrived here, and are exploring.
Now make sure you read very quietly because we wouldn't want to wake the MOON MONSTERS. They are very mean creatures with huge eyes and a big mouth, and you'd be sorry if you woke them up.

Note: From the point of view of the narrator - well woven in - easy style.

8. Conversation

Conversation refers to the use in dialogue of direct quotations from the various characters.

0 Little or None -- This may mean little or no use of conversation in a story, or there may be an ineffective attempt at use.

1 Some -- There may be some (or a lot of) conversation, but it is used rather tritely. For example, the use of 'said' may be overdone.

2 Good -- The author uses conversation naturally; he may even try dialect.

Examples:

Little: One day there was a boy named Darrell. He had a boat that was made of cardboard. One day he heard his father say that they would go to Florida. ... One day bright and early they did go to Florida. On the way Darrell said, "Is this Florida?" No. They were in Atlanta, Georgia.... Finally, they were at the beach. Darrell got out his boat. Splash!

Some: I called out, "Where are you? Who are you?"
The voice cried out again, "I am Peter Dustspeck and I'm way down here on your thumb!"
"Which dustspeck are you?" I asked, very much surprised.
"I'm the blue and green plaid dustspeck right next to this red one."

Note: Nice exchange

Good: ...Frida Fiction caught a cold. Everyone else in the library told her to go home and get lots of rest. Frida said,
"Oh, but you see, I can't. I'm having some new fiction books over and I must show them to the guest shelves."
"We'll all catch colds if you don't. Come on!"
"Please, Frida," said Sammy Science. ...
"Positively absolutely not, N-O!" answered Frida.
"Frida, even if we welcomed them in and acted like your maids?" asked the Travel Twins, Trixie and Terri.
"Definitely not."

Note: Skillful handling of group conversation

9. Detail

Detail refers to the author's choice of incident or detail which adds fullness to the story's structure or outline.

0 Little or None -- Everything is very general.

1 Some -- Some specifics are given to add to the reality effect.

2 Good -- Enough detail is given (without being tedious) to give the illusion of reality.

Examples:

Little: One Christmas Eve night every child in Badgertown was asleep in his own bed. When they woke up next morning, they were disappointed because Santa Claus didn't come. Later everybody went to the North Pole and asked Santa why he never came last night.

Note: This stays very general. For example, the reader is not even told how the children went to the North Pole.

Some: Then they saw a gorilla. It had long sharp finger nails and sharp, sharp teeth. The children tried to get out of the room. But the door was locked, and the children could not get out of th room. The gorilla got closer and closer, with his great big eyeball getting closer than ever. They ran around the gorilla and jumped out the window.

Note: Detail is used to describe the scary effect of the gorilla.

Good: There was much talk of the cold weather at supper, but Sara did not contribute, because she was so excited about that big box in the living room. Finally, Uncle Nick finished his apple cobbler and it was time for presents. Sara's heart was beating like she had just run thirteen miles. She ran into the living room and over to that big box. Before you could say, "Pretty little kitty cat," she had the box open....

Note: There is an illusion of reality in this passage. The author says, for example, "Finally, Uncle Nick finished his apple cobbler....", which is much more believable than "Finally supper was over", or even "Finally Uncle Nick finished dessert."

10. Appeals To Senses

Appeals to senses mean the way in which the author causes the reader to become involved in smelling, hearing, tasting, or feeling as well as the conventional "seeing" through reading.

0 Limited -- The author does not often appeal to senses.

1 Some -- The author may appeal to sight. There may be nice description.

2 Good -- The author appeals to at least two senses, sometimes more.

Examples:

Limited: Once upon a time there was a witch and she had no broom. Days and more days passed, and they passed so fast that tonight was Halloween. But the witch knew it was Halloween Night. ... The trouble was the witch had no broom to go out to Halloween Night. So the witch made a broom, and the witch got to go out to Halloween.

Some: Delly had red hair with braids that stuck out (they were so tightly braided), and she also had twickleing blue eyes, and since she had nothing to wear except the clothes she was wearing then, she had a red dress with patches all over it. Delly also had striped stockings all the way up to her knees.

Good: Crash! Bang! Screech! People flew from their seats. A black and yellow parrot flew from its concealment in a little girl's purse. A man who was passing peppermint candy around fell back onto the rich German lady's lap. She screamed and shouted, "Well, I never!" in German, while the man sat there with his feet dangling in the air. An umbrella hit Frederich on the head and made him feel very dizzy.

11. Values

Values refer to those beliefs or thoughts which come through in the telling of a story - and which reflect deeper meanings given to the actions in the story. An author often places values on certain areas of experience as he orders a "world" for his story. These values may come through as insights here and there or as an overall theme.

0 Little or None -- Little or no values are apparent.

1 Ordinary -- The story shows some values, perhaps a moral tied on at the end.

2 Well-presented -- Meanings or values come through with effect - and without detracting too much from the story itself. There may be a strong theme.

Examples:

Little: Once there was a man named Mr. Hill. All his life he wanted to go to the moon. ... So he bought a rocket and a space suit. He jumped in and put his space suit on. As soon as he was in, he said the countdown and off he went. He was going around the moon when he saw a strange sight. It was a witch, for it was Halloween at earth.

Note: This is a story of an adventure, and probably no deeper meaning is intended.

Ordinary: When the Russians found out that Dave knew about the treasure, they really started looking for it, but Dave was ahead of them.

Many a man was killed in that war, but it was still won -- all because of a treasure more valuable than gold. It was called confidence.

Note: After a straight story line, a moral is brought out at the end.

Well-presented: But there were other elves who worked very, very much, and Santa did not give them presents. So the elves said, "If you don't give us presents, we'll step on your foot and we'll jump on you." Santa said, "But you don't give each other presents, so why do I have to give you presents?" So the elves felt funny inside, because they did not give the other elves presents. So they felt bad inside. But they thought Santa was right.

Note: Definite values operating here

12. Situation

Situation refers to the problem situation (and its inherent interest or lack of interest).

0 Uninteresting -- The story may be dull, or the situation may be well-worn.

1 Interesting -- The story may be interesting with a promising situation, but not too extraordinary.

2 Outstanding -- The story has unusual interest, or a unique situation.

Examples:

Uninteresting: Once a man wanted to go to Pluto. So he got a rocket and did.

Note: The situation could have been made more interesting by adding more about the man's wanting to go there and how he managed to get a rocket.

Interesting: Did you know we had a visitor from Mars? Well, we did. He was named Sparky. ... He landed in the country. Then he saw a cow. He said to the cow, "Take me to your leader." "Moooooo." "I never heard that kind of talk before." Next Sparky saw a tractor. Then he said, "Take me to your leader." But the tractor just sat there. "Quiet sort of fellow, isn't he?" said Sparky.

Note: This story has interest and humor, but the "Take me to your leader" bit is not original.

Outstanding: She was at a football field. Soon the game started and she watched it very carefully. Then the Lambkin found her footprints home. She told all the other lambkins about her fun. She said: First there is a pasture with lines on it. Then some goats with two legs come out and fight over a pumpkin....

Note: A lamb's view of a football game can provide an interesting or humorous situation. (Different)

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

The rationale for the selection and naming of the elements is given below:

Structure was chosen to incorporate the ideas of plot, climax, problem, resolution, the usual components considered in fiction writing. The overall design or organization seems to get at all of these. If the story is designed well, it will have the other things--or else enough of a story line to make a satisfying reading experience. In the interest of simplicity and efficiency, elements were named as broadly inclusive of related aspects as possible, without infringing on the exclusiveness of other elements.

Ending was chosen apart from structure because a satisfying ending is so important to the totality of the reading experience, the impact, the culmination, that which leaves an impression is paramount for consideration. Beginning, however, is not included as a separate element, since even the trite beginning, "Once upon a time . . ." is a cue that a story is to unfold--and awakens the reader's anticipation.

Sentence Structure is included, since stilted or awkward sentence sequences (or construction) interfere with a story's effectiveness, whereas a skillful use of a variety of sentence types adds much to a story's style. This is perhaps the most "quantitative" element on the scale and easiest to judge.

Word Usage is broadly inclusive. Any unusual or effective use of words using specific words to general effectiveness of style is meant here. Good writing involves quite basically the effective use of words. Yet the element of word usage can include a number of things to consider, i.e., imagery, coinage of new words, alliteration, etc. For all of this, the element was not broken down into separate items, because it was felt that the complexity of scoring would outweigh the advantages. If any aspect of word usage is especially noteworthy, it will add to a story's quality. The rater will, of course, have to make the distinction

between some usage (or promising attempts) and unusual handling of different aspects of word usage.

Characterization is essential to the good story, as is Setting. However, amateur writers often turn out stereotyped or paper-thin characters, whereas the skillful writer presents well-developed characters. Too, amateur writers may neglect to set a story in time or place--yet any story, whether real or make-believe, must happen in some kind of milieu.

Point of View is necessary to a story's telling--and a writer chooses a point of view, whether consciously or not. The amateur writer may not be aware of this necessity, and thus become confused in the telling or narration, which in turn confuses the reader.

Conversation may not be necessary to every good story, but the effective handling of dialogue is a mark of maturity, and will add to any story. In cases where an excellent story has no need for conversation and none is used, the score will be high enough for recognition, even without the points from this element.

Detail is essential, not too much and not too little, but enough to give the illusion of reality. This is important, even in fantasy, for a story must hang together in a real, or logical, way--if it is not to be nonsense. The description of the element in the scale is as follows: Detail refers to the author's choice of incident or detail which adds fullness to the story's structure or outline.

Appeals to Senses also add to the quality of a story. Appeals to more than one sense are the mark of a mature writer and serve to give the reader the further impression of reality.

The naming of the element values was done only after much deliberation, since no value judgment was to be made other than a quantitative one as to how much of the element was present in a story. The term "values" was chosen over theme, meanings, philosophy, and the like, as incorporating the totality of the

way in which the author ordered the world of his story.

Finally, Situation was chosen as an element--apart from structure, because the overall situation is important in a story. Here, originality, humor, imagination, suspense, and other elements that are not discrete components of fiction may come into play.